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Why Will Thou Bind Thy Lovely Brow?

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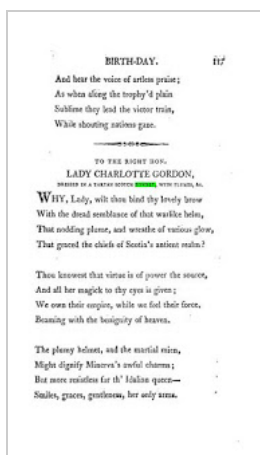
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Pride and Prejudice: The Student Blog

Thursday, March 21, 2013

Why Will Thou Bind Thy Lovely Brow?

Originally published in London in 1799, *The Minstrel: in Two Books* is a two-volume book of poetry by Scottish poet James Hay Beattie. Though Beattie's long poem "The Minstrel" encompasses a large portion of the book, there are several of his other poems as well, including a poem titled "To the Right Honorable Lady Charlotte Gordon, Dressed in a Tartan, Scotch Bonnet with Plumes, etc." In this poem, Beattie directly addresses a young woman whose bonnet he does not like. He begins by asking Lady Charlotte: "Why, Lady, wilt thou bind thy lovely brow/With the dread semblance of that war-like helm" (Beattie 1-2). For Beattie, the plumed bonnet resembles a military helmet that detracts from rather than enhances Lady Charlotte's physical attractiveness. Though he does acknowledge the loveliness of her eyes, Beattie persists with his image of her bonnet as a masculine object describing it as a "plumy helmet" and referring to her demeanor as a "martial mien." Beattie concludes the poem by decrying Minerva, the goddess of war and wisdom, by calling her charms "awful," and offers instead the "Idalian queen" as the example Lady Charlotte should follow. She, unlike the wise and militant Minerva, relies solely on her femininity, thus rendering her the more attractive.



This public scrutiny and debate about what constitutes an attractive woman is seen throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Because of Mr. Darcy's interest in her, Elizabeth is singled out by both male and female characters to be regarded, measured, and in the case of Miss Bingley, found wanting in terms of female beauty. When Elizabeth arrives at Netherfield to visit Jane, the Bingley sisters observe her appearance and her dirty petticoat and begin a two-fold assassination of both her beauty and her character. The act of walking a moderate distance alone and dirtying her petticoat dooms her as independent, and thus unfeminine in Miss Bingley's eyes. Though certainly phrased much more civilly, Beattie's critique of Lady Charlotte's bonnet is no less a slight on her femininity. Taken together, a reader cannot help but sympathize with Elizabeth and other Regency women whose slightest wardrobe malfunction opened them up to intense scrutiny and unkind, baseless critiques.

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Posted by **Jessie Batten** at 6:25 PM

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About

A blog site featuring original research by undergraduate students at Wright State University enrolled in Crystal B. Lal's *Pride and Prejudice* (Spring 2013).

We hope you enjoy reading about the novel and historical contexts surrounding the famous novel. And be sure to participate in CELIA's Bicentennial events on October 2013. Click [here](#) for more information.

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